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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAN, U.S., AFGHANISTAN, U.S.-CHINA,
CLIMATE,
EU;BERLIN

- ¶1. Lead Stories
- ¶2. (Iran) Nuclear Conflict, Maneuvers
- ¶3. (U.S.) Healthcare Reform
- ¶4. (Afghanistan) U.S. Arming Local Militias
- ¶5. (U.S.-China) Relations
- ¶6. (Climate) Copenhagen Conference
- ¶7. (EU) Future Leadership

¶1. Lead Stories Summary

Print media had a variety of lead stories ranging from the intention
of the European Parliament to block the nomination of the designated

EU "foreign minister," Catherine Ashton (Sueddeutsche), to an
address
by Chancellor Merkel in which she advocated an increase in child
allowances (FAZ), to the effects the increase of the VAT would have

for hotels (Die Welt). Editorials focused on the debate over
subsidies for Opel and the new leadership of the SPD in Baden-
Wuerttemberg. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute and ARD-TV's
early
evening newscast Tagesschau opened with a story on a deal between
Deutsche Bahn and Qatar to build a railroad network in Qatar worth
17
billion euros.

¶2. (Iran) Nuclear Conflict, Maneuvers

Sueddeutsche (11/21) headlined: "Iran faces new
sanctions-international
community disappointed over Tehran's attitude" and added: "The
chances
of success for President Obama's rapprochement policy are waning."

Frankfurter Allgemeine headlined "Iran given time until December"

and
highlighted: "The P5 and Germany want to come to a final conclusion
in
December whether Iran is prepared to start serious negotiations over
its nuclear program."

Several Saturday papers reported on IAEA chief Baradei's visit to
Berlin, noting that he called on the Iranian leadership to engage
more
creatively in international diplomacy and understand that they have
for the first time the commitment of an American President to start
comprehensive negotiations on the basis of mutual respect and
without
any preconditions. "The outgoing IAEA chief said in Berlin on
Friday
that he does not believe that Iran has already given a definite
response," Frankfurter Allgemeine reported.

Under the headline "Farewell to Ahmadinejad," Sddeutsche (11/21)
editorialized: "Ahmadinejad does not benefit from the helplessness
of
the opposition. He has huge problems in parliament because
conservative opponents are demanding an investigation over billions
that have disappeared from his budget. The powerful Majlis chairman
Ali Larijani is serious about it as salaries are not always paid and
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the prices and discontent are on the rise. The worst result of the
elimination of the opposition is the divide of the society.
Everybody
who can intellectually and economically afford it is turning away
from
the regime. Fantasies over toppling the regime are spreading in
Tehran's taxis-that's something nobody would have said months ago.

The people say that this cannot go on. However, it goes on."

Several papers (11/23) report today on Iran's military maneuvers.
Die
Welt headlined: "Iran is preparing for its defense - Tehran begins a
major maneuver to protect its nuclear sites - a warning to Israel"
and
added in its introduction: "With a military maneuver, the Iranian
revolutionary guards demonstratively warn Israel against an
airstrike
against the Islamic Republic's nuclear plants." FT Deutschland
headlined: "Iran is preparing its defense against military strikes -
IAEA head hopes for a compromise in the nuclear dispute."

13. (U.S.) Healthcare Reform

Many papers (11/23) report that healthcare reform has gotten past a
major obstacle in the U.S. Financial Times Deutschland
sub-headlined;
"Victory on Waystation for Obama - 'Super Majority' of 60 votes
Allows
Debate - But Approval not Guaranteed" and wrote: "The path to a
final
bill is still far away and is to last to the next year."
Frankfurter
Allgemeine headlined: "Senate Allows Debate over Healthcare Draft,"
and reported: "The vote is considered the first test vote for a
future
implementation of the reform In a statement that was released by
the

White House, President Obama expressed his gratitude that the Senate, at the beginning of the debate decided to allow the debate. Majority leader Reid said that he hoped that a vote on the bill in the Senate could take place before Christmas." Sueddeutsche Zeitung said under the headline: "Stage Victory for Obama" that "President Obama's most ambitious plan has taken another hurdle. The White House welcomed the vote as a 'historic vote.'" The headline in Die Welt is: "Obama's Healthcare Reform Takes First Hurdle in the Senate," and wrote: "The U.S. Senate decided with a vote of 60 to 39 to put the healthcare reform bill on the agenda for a formal debate. At the same time, a second poll revealed that the approval for President Obama's policy has dropped below the 50 percent level. Obviously the reason is the ongoing and bitter debate in Congress about healthcare reform and

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the economic situation."

In an editorial, Frankfurter Allgemeine (11/23) a noted: "If President Obama, in the first ten months in office, had cursed the expectations he raised during his election campaign, then he has not learned his lessons. Routinely, the White House again described as 'historic,' what is no more than a tiny step on the path to healthcare reform. The Senate is now only willing to deliberate the bill. You can look at it at from whatever angle you like: there will certainly be tough discussions over Obama's reform plan before the President can really enter the history books with a historic reform."

Under the headline: "Better Insight," Sueddeutsche Zeitung (11/23) editorialized: "In the end, the survival instinct of the Democrats won. The Republicans are opposed to anything that the president wants...and this strategy is bearing fruit. The Americans are getting the feeling that the President and his Democrats, whom they elected to give the country a new direction, are unable to move anything. That is why it is so important that the Democrats are pushing healthcare reform. If not, they cannot present anything in the Congressional elections next year.... But if, in the end, the reform will be watered down to such an extent that not too much will be left of this epoch-making plan, then they would not only have done a great disservice to their party and their president but also to their country."

In a front-page editorial headlined: "Bad Times for Great Victories," Financial Times Deutschland (11/23) opined: "Of course, it is a success for Barack Obama that, following the House of Representatives, the Senate is now also willing to discuss his healthcare reform bill...but the question is how high the price will be that the President has to pay. It is primarily his Democratic camp that Barack Obama

must convince of the benefits of the reform. He still has the majority in both houses of Congress, but the next elections will take place in 2010. Obama is in a dilemma. If he makes too many concessions to conservative senators he will come under pressure from left-wing Democrats, and if he remains tough, he will risk a failure of the entire reform."

14. (Afghanistan) U.S. Arming Local Militias

There are only two reports in this morning's press that the U.S. plans to support locals to fight against the Taliban. Sueddeutsche Zeitung

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(11/23) reported under the headline: "More Afghan Soldiers" that "the Afghan government plans to extend the country's police and militia force and wants to double its current size. By doing so, Afghanistan will meet U.S. and NATO requirements that greater responsibility be handed to the Afghan security forces. In the fight against the radical-Islamic Taliban, the governments in Washington and Kabul want to intensify cooperation with tribal militia groups. The New York Times reported on Sunday that in parts of Afghanistan both parties have already begun to support such militia groups. According to the Times, the U.S. military in Afghanistan wants to support primarily existing tribal militia groups of help set up new groups in the trouble provinces in the South and East of the country. Afghan and U.S. officials had expressed their hope that with such an approach, thousands of armed people could be brought together to defend their villages against the Taliban."

Frankfurter Allgemeine (11/23) wrote: "In the fight against the Taliban, U.S. armed forces obviously are supporting local forces more openly and more resolutely than in the past. U.S. media reported this over the weekend, referring to high-ranking U.S. officers in Afghanistan. By paying local militia forces, they want to help them defend themselves and their villages against the still hatred Taliban in their strongholds in the South and the East of the country. Afghan and U.S. government officials expressed their hope that the anti-Taliban militia forces could help bridge the gap until sufficient Afghan security forces are equipped and trained to create security in the country."

In an editorial, Frankfurter Allgemeine (11/23) argued: "For how long does President Obama plan to put off a decision on what is to be achieved in Afghanistan and how many soldiers are necessary to achieve these goals? And the question is whether the President can remove the doubts and questions that are now characterizing the public debate over the issue with a courageous decision. The fact that the Americans are now recalling the belligerent tribal culture in Afghanistan and plan to recruit local militia groups for 'self-defense purposes' against the Taliban may be obvious at first sight. But this approach harbors risks. In 2001, when the Taliban were ousted, the Americans already pinned their hopes on local war lords. That is

another reason why Osama bin Laden was able to escape."

15. (U.S.-China) Relations

Frankfurter Allgemeine (11/22) editorialized on its front-page: "The U.S. has never before been so dependent on China, as China holds a large portion of loans to the American government. Economically, both

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countries are closely linked. Particularly after the economic crisis, China with its robust growth is America's and the world's hope. The obviously proud Chinese government knows how much the American superpower relies on it and did not think it was necessary to make any commitments during Obama's recent four-day visit. There were no promises to increase the value of the Chinese currency or other political pledges. Beijing still does not want to agree to sanctions on Iran. On North Korea, China officially sticks to the six-party talks and North Korea's denuclearization, but simultaneously keeps the ailing country alive with economic assistance and trade. Concerning climate policy, there were general promises to cooperate in the future, but hardly anything specific. Obama looked lonely at the end of his visit to the Great Wall.... Beijing reacts with mistrust to America's offer to resolve the problems of the 21st century together, and some strategists even reject this offer. It remains unclear how China sees its role as a Pacific power. Beijing is also speaking of multilateralism, but not a multilateralism defined by America."

16. (Climate) Copenhagen Conference

Under the headline: "65 State Leaders To Attend Climate Summit," Financial Times Deutschland (11/23) reported: "State and government leaders from 65 nations have promised to attend the final stage of the Copenhagen climate summit in December. Among them are Chancellor Merkel, French President Sarkozy, Britain's PM Gordon Brown, and Brazil's President Lula da Silva. It is still open whether President Obama will also come to Copenhagen. With these high level promises to attend, the chances for a political agreement on climate protection are rising. The participation of these state leaders on December 17 and 18 shows that they consider a breakthrough to be possible. They would not travel to Copenhagen for a failure. According to Chancellor Merkel, an agreement in Copenhagen is to lead to the formulation of an international agreement. She is striving for a signing in the first half of 2010, with her as the host, for the next large-scale climate meeting is scheduled to take place in Bonn in June."

Regional daily DarmstQdter Echo (11/21) judged: "During the financial and economic crisis, the international community demonstrated that it is able to act quickly and resolutely. But in the climate crisis it

has not yet given evidence of this resolve, even though the consequences of global warming are much more serious for mankind in

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the long run than the most recent collapse of the global economy."

17. (EU) Future Leadership

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (11/21) opined: "Catherine Ashton's nomination is even more worrying than van Rompuy's. To give this post, which also includes the establishment of a European foreign service, to someone who has no idea of foreign or security policy, let alone experience in the difficult arena of diplomacy, edges on the deliberate impediment of European foreign policy. Apart from the fact that it is a little embarrassing that Ashton owes her job to her gender, the EU state leaders made clear with this election what they really want: someone who will not meddle in their national go-it-alones around the world."

Tagesspiegel am Sonntag (11/22) observed under the headline: "Skeptical about Turkey" that "outside of Belgium people do not know much of Hermann van Rompuy. Among the things people know about him outside the EU is that he is a faithful Catholic and at the same time, doubts Turkey's chances to accede to the EU. The concern of Turkish politicians that Turkey's acceptance could now become impossible is not unfounded because the Belgian will now strengthen the camp of Turkey skeptics Sarkozy and Merkel. But we need not overestimate his power either. If the majority of EU states want Turkey's accession, then van Rompuy would be unable to prevent it."

MURPHY